



New England Fishery Management Council

News Release

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Quota Increases for Groundfish Stock Topic of Discussion at Upcoming New England Fishery Management Council Meeting

The New England Fishery Management Council today announced that the recently reported improvement in white hake stock condition opens the door for a higher than anticipated quota for this stock in fishing year 2013. Based on the new information, the 2013 allowable biological catch could be increased by 13 percent to just over nine million pounds from proposed limits of approximately eight million pounds.

“We plan to discuss a white hake quota increase during our April Council meeting and I anticipate a request that NOAA Fisheries take emergency action to implement this increase,” said Rip Cunningham, Chair, New England Fishery Management Council. “Given the very real challenges facing groundfishermen in 2013, we have to do everything we can to help them.”

“We have a disaster in the groundfish fishery due to depleted stocks of cod, Gulf of Maine haddock, and Georges Bank yellowtail flounder. A disaster warrants emergency measures,” said NOAA Fisheries Northeast Regional Administrator, John Bullard. “If the Council requests emergency action, we would move as quickly as possible to respond to that request and continue to look for other opportunities to assist the industry and support businesses during these difficult times.”

According to the results of the recent regional stock assessment workshop, the white hake stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. Spawning stock biomass for this stock has generally increased from a low of around 17 million pounds in 1997 to more than 59 million pounds in 2011.

Proposed 2013 catch limits for Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank cod are 78 percent and 61 percent lower than the 2012 catch limits, respectively. Substantial reductions are also proposed for other stocks including Gulf of Maine haddock, Georges Bank yellowtail flounder, American plaice, witch flounder, Cape Cod/Gulf of Maine yellowtail flounder and Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic yellowtail flounder. However, reductions in catch limits do not necessarily mean reductions in catch. For four of these stocks, the proposed catch limits for 2013 are equal to or higher than what has been caught so far by the fishery in the current fishing year. And for other groundfish stocks, including healthy redfish and pollock, proposed catch limits will actually be increased or stay the same as catch limits in 2012.

"As a groundfish fisherman, I appreciate that the Council and NOAA Fisheries are willing to move forward ASAP with this white hake quota increase, especially since I'm facing a low cod allocation this coming season," said Michael Russo, commercial groundfish fishermen.

Several other Council-recommended measures that would provide additional fishing opportunities are under consideration by NOAA Fisheries. For instance, the Council recommended that sectors be able to request to fish in certain areas that were closed to help reduce fishing mortality on groundfish stocks, and that a catch limit be established in 2013 for Southern New England/Mid-Atlantic winter flounder, which would allow landings of these fish. This winter flounder stock is currently not allocated to sectors. The proposed winter flounder quota should generate an estimated \$5.4 million in additional ex-vessel revenue for the fishery while still preventing overfishing on this stock.

The NEFMC, one of eight regional organizations established by federal legislation in 1976, is charged with conserving and managing fishery resources from three to 200 miles off the coasts of Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut.

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